

Metal detector survey of the East Cemetery, Aska in Hagebyhöga, Östergötland

Report on fieldwork in September 2020. Listed ancient monument L2009:9662 = Raä 79.
Vadstena kommun. Lst dnr 431-6367-20.

By Martin Rundkvist & Julia Schulte Koskinen, 26 January 2021

Background & results

The East Cemetery at Aska came to the attention of archaeology in 2006, when a metal detector survey directed by Rundkvist located a cluster of later Middle Viking Period jewellery in the open field south-east of the Aska platform mound (Rundkvist 2011:93, 97).

The oldest plan of the site is found on a 1688 *geometrisk avmätning* map. At that time, much of the site had already been ploughed over, and the map shows a long narrow field impediment along a road. A 1767 *storskifte* map shows seven impediments, and an 1861 *laga skifte* map shows none. After the *laga skifte* land reform, the road was ploughed out. But one field impediment survived until the 1950s, judging from oral tradition and an aerial photograph kept by the Karlsson family who live next to the site.

The Karlssons were very kind and supportive during the 2020 fieldwork on the platform mound and on the cemetery site under discussion here. On 12 September, Rundkvist directed 70.2 person hours of metal detecting across the assumed extent of the cemetery, as deduced from where finds were made in 2006. The team made rich finds and expanded the cluster mainly towards the north and north-east. One undisturbed furnished inhumation grave was seen in a little detector pit and left for future excavation.

The oldest find is a piece of a brooch from c. 750-840. But as expected, the site mainly yielded additional fragmented copper-alloy jewellery from the later Middle Viking Period c. AD 940-1000. None of the finds show any damage from the cremation pyre. The extant burial encountered during fieldwork is an inhumation.

As for finds from the period AD 1000-1600, the team found a small assortment of everyday objects. Only two stand out for their quality and early dates: a rare Late Viking Period spur fitting and a gilded finger ring of 12th century date.

Thanks to Tobias Bondesson, Ny Björn Gustafsson and Yngve Karlsson for help with classifying several finds! And to Göran Thorén for information about the 1885 cairn!



50-metre grid in RT90. Plan by Jon Lundin.

Methodology

Rundkvist divided the area into eight 50-metre squares on the RT90 grid and recorded how many person-hours of metal detecting were done in each. The ground conditions were excellent, recently ploughed and harrowed, but heavy rain in the afternoon hampered work. The average search intensity was 9.2 person-hours per 2500 sqm or 3.7 person-hours per 1000 sqm. All finds were pinpointed with a hand-held hiking GPS. The detectorists avoided digging on iron signals. The team reburied most of what Rundkvist could not date and everything he could date to after 1600.

Sq	Finds	Person hours	Area sqm	Finds / hr / 10,000 sqm	Pers hrs / 2500 sqm
BA	5	8.5	2500	2.4	8.5
BB	1	7.5	1786	0.7	10.5
BC	0	14.0	2222	0.0	15.8
BD	12	12.0	2500	4.0	12.0
BE	5	7.3	2500	2.7	7.3
BF	6	8.5	2500	2.8	8.5
BG	0	7.3	2500	0.0	7.3
BH	3	5.0	2500	2.4	5.0
Sum		70.1	19008		

An extant burial

Already the finds made in 2006 suggested that the site is a ploughed-out cemetery. This was confirmed when detectorist Patrik Svantesson dug on a strong signal in sq BD and encountered two pieces of the base shell from a Middle Viking Period tortoise brooch. These he lifted, and then he uncovered some bones and other pieces of metalwork that he left undisturbed. The brooch shell was replaced and the pit was back-filled.

The pit's coordinates were SWEREF 99 TM: 6478863, 498872 -- RT90: 6481120, 1451859. The depth was 25 cm and the farmer reported that he ploughs to 17 cm depth. This calls for a speedy rescue excavation.

Finds

Early and Middle Viking Period 790-1000

The oldest datable find is part of the openwork dome on top of the disc from a Late Vendel or Early Viking Period disc-on-bow brooch, c. 750-840. It was in the main find cluster, in sq BD. There is then a gap of a century or more before the main phase of late Middle Viking Period burial begins after c. AD 940.

It was known since 2006 that this phase at the site is characterised by unburnt jewellery. The new finds are more of the same, fragmented P52 tortoise brooches and a crown-shaped finial from an equal-armed brooch. Less usual is a continental fitting in the shape of a mammal's head that has been converted into a brooch. N.B. Gustafsson has pointed to parallels in period manuscript art. Two pieces of silver dirham coins have yet to undergo detailed study. Y. Karlsson believes however that one is a Samanid and suggests that it may have been struck for Ismail b. Ahmad 279-295 H = AD 892-908. The other might be a dirham imitation. There are no male dress accessories, unless a few nondescript belt fittings belong to this phase. They are difficult to date.

P52 is not one of the earlier double-shelled tortoise brooch types. There are in fact no finds from the earlier half of the Middle Viking Period, nor from the phase's final quarter when type P48 tortoise brooches were fashionable. This suggests that the cemetery was used quite briefly, for only 30-40 years from c. AD 940 to 975. In all likelihood it was terminated by conversion to Christianity. Fivelstad church is clearly visible across the fields to the south-east. Three pieces of inscribed early Christian burial monuments found at the church demonstrate that the current stone structure was preceded by a wooden church during the 11th century.

After AD 1000

Signs of activity at the cemetery continue into the Ringerike phase after AD 1000 in the shape of a basket-shaped spur finial from the Late Viking Period. At this late date, this elite male attribute is unlikely to represent furnished burial. Indeed, it was found alone in sq BB between the cemetery cluster and the Aska platform mound. A gilded twisted copper-alloy finger ring is likely to date from the 1100s. A few nondescript later or undateable objects were also collected, of which the latest is a silver *hwid* coin struck for Christian I of Denmark in 1448-81. Two small unreadable silver coins may prove to be even later than the *hwid* when legible after conservation.

Not the site of the rich 1885 burial

An extremely rich Early Viking Period weapon burial under a cairn was found at Aska in 1885, at an unspecified distance due east of the platform mound. Rundkvist has suggested (2011:92) that this might have been the site investigated for this report. This identification was first questioned by Schulte Koskinen in a term paper, who instead suggested a location further east. Local historian and genealogist Göran Thorén then verified this conclusion, citing period newspaper reports and the property registry.

The 1885 cairn was on land that belonged to Östergården farmstead and was owned by one Gustaf Olsson. (He is the maternal grandfather of the maternal grandfather of the current landowners, the Rehn brothers.) There has been some confusion, because Olsson lived at Mellangården farmstead, yet owned some land under Östergården. The only plot that fulfils these parameters is around the smallholding Rosenlund, 400 m east of the platform mound's eastern end.

No field monuments survive here today. But Carl Fredrik Nordenskjöld (1875) described a large ancient cairn cemetery that had been flattened when the Östergården farmstead moved to a low hill immediately east of Rosenlund after the 1861 *laga skifte* land reform. These cairns contained inhumations and urned cremations. The site is registered as Raä Hagebyhöga 44 = L2009:7907. It appears that the richly furnished cairn demolished on Gustaf Olsson's land in 1885 would have been on the west edge of the Östergården cemetery, which had in turn been mostly destroyed over 20 years previously.

Bibliography

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Administrativa

County admin case number	431-6367-20
Municipality	Vadstena
Location	Aska in Hagebyhöga
Property	Aska 8:15
Site number	L2009:9662 = Raä 79
Site type	Ploughed-out cemetery
Type of fieldwork	Metal detector survey
Rationale	Research and outreach
Project director	Martin Rundkvist
Permit keeper	Östergötlands Läns Museum
County case administrator	Malin Svarvar
Fieldwork period	12 September 2020
Archiving	The documentation was compact and was transferred to digital media during fieldwork. There is nothing to archive in addition to this report.

Participants

Ahlstrand Uffe
Ancker Johan
Blomqvist Micke
Hed Martin Gunnar
Lander Michael

Leverin Frank
Lindberg Håkan
Lindelöf Magnus
Lärk Kenth
Orell Aarno

Södergren Olle
Svantesson Patrik
Tibell Anna-Lena
Westerberg Mattias
Österblad Magnus

2020 finds list

Fno	Mtrl	Object	Spec	Weight	x	y	Date	Finder
201	Cu	Fitting		2.6	6481105	1451929	?	MGH
202	Cu	Spur fitting		13.2	6481168	1451833	VIK3	Olle
203	Cu	Ring	Twisted, gilded	3.8	6481063	1451824	MED	
204	Cu	Brooch	Horse head	13.4	6481152	1451862	VIK2	
205	Pb	Spindle whorl		8.7	6481125	1451947	VIK-MED	
206	Cu	Tortoise brooch	P52 top shell	11.4	6481137	1451887	VIK2	MGH
207	Cu	Tortoise brooch	P52 base shell	5.6	6481096	1451885	VIK2	M Lander
208	Ag	Coin	Dirham Samanid	0.6	6481135	1451897	VIK2 (892-908?)	
209	Ag	Coin	Dirham imitation?	1.1	6481162	1451885	VIK2	Olle
210	Ag	Coin	Christian I, hwid	0.6	6481161	1451896	MED 1448-81	MGH
211	Cu	Disc	Decorated, gilded	1.1	6481115	1451930	MOD	Frank
212	Ag	Coin	?	0.7	6481095	1451839	MOD?	MÖ
213	Ag	Coin	?	0.8	6481130	1451884	MOD?	Erik
214	Cu	Tortoise brooch?	Base shell?	0.9	6481124	1451856	VIK?	
215	Cu	Tortoise brooch	P52 base shell	1.7	6481095	1451815	VIK2	
216	Cu	Tortoise brooch?	Top shell?	1.0	6481106	1451874	VIK2?	Erik
217	Cu	Tortoise brooch?	Top shell?	1.1	6481106	1451892	VIK2?	M Lander
218	Cu	Disc	Embossed bumps	5.7	6481065	1451839	?	
219	Flint	Chip		1.4	6481168	1451896	?	
220		<i>Discarded</i>						
221	Cu	Equal-armed brooch	Crown finial	5.1	6481134	1451951	VIK2	Frank
222	Cu	Sheet	Punched	1.2	6481086	1451801	VIK-MED	
223	Cu	Tortoise brooch	P52 base shell	12.2	6481064	1451854	VIK2	Uffe
224	Cu	Tortoise brooch	Base shell	4.2	6481083	1451890	VIK2	
225	Cu	Knob		7.5	6481097	1451885	?	Erik
226	Cu	?	Openwork relief	2.7	6481190	1451896	?	
227	Cu	Tortoise brooch	P52 top shell	4.3	6481099	1451874	VIK2	Frank
228	Cu	Strap end	With leather	3.3	6481094	1451896	VIK-MED	
229	Cu	?	Embossed relief	0.3	6481139	1451880	?	MGH
230	Cu	Double fitting	With leather	2.5	6481069	1451866	VIK-MED	Uffe
231	Cu	Tortoise brooch	Top shell	1.7	6481139	1451884	VIK2	MGH
232	Cu	?	Relief	0.5	6481135	1451867	?	MGH
233	Cu	?	Openwork relief	2.9	6481101	1451870	?	
234	Cu	Disc-on-bow brooch		3.5	6481114	1451881	VIK1	Frank
235	Cu	Strap fitting	Punched	1.2	6481117	1451871	MED	
		Grave			6481120	1451859	VIK2	

2006 finds list

These finds are not part of the case reported on here, but are included in this report to collect all the site data in one place.

Fno	Mtrl	Object	Spec	x	y	Dat
2006:19	Cu	Disc brooch		1451863	6481102	VIK2
2006:20	Cu	Disc brooch		1451842	6481129	VIK2
2006:21	Cu	Tortoise brooch	Gilded decoration	1451842	6481134	VIK2
2006:22	Cu	Tortoise brooch	P52 crown finial	1451868	6481101	VIK2
2006:23	Cu	Brooch	Pin hinge	1451873	6481095	VIK
2006:24	Cu	Tortoise brooch	P52 top shell	1451855	6481129	VIK2
2006:25	Cu	Tortoise brooch	P52 top shell	1451874	6481100	VIK2
2006:26	Cu	Jewellery chain		1451780	6481254	VIK
2006:27	Cu	Tortoise brooch	P52 base shell (fit)	1451868	6481098	VIK2
2006:28	Cu	Tortoise brooch	P52 base shell (fit)	1451877	6481087	VIK2
2006:29	Ag	Filigree bead		1451861	6481098	VIK2

2020 finds photographs











2006 finds photographs

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F2006:19 after conservation. Diam 64 mm.



F2006:20 before conservation. Diam 38 mm.



F2006:21



F2006:22



F2006:24-25



F2006:26



F2006:27



F2006:29



F2006:28 top & bottom, F2006:27, pin hinge F2006:23



The 1767 storskifte map



The east cemetery on the *storskifte* map of 1767. Note the platform mound “Aska Hög” and the group of green field impediments at no. 3.